

Acceptance Speech of Dr. Cristina Montiel

This research project builds bridges across cultural divides, on several layers of fractured group relations. First the research process itself reflects a forging of academic efforts between an Ateneo Psychology Department's research lab and the Institute for Peace and Development of the Mindanao State University in GenSan. Second, the social-research intervention involves mini theater productions by the research participants consisting of peace leaders from two different groups, embedded in the Mindanao conflict – MILF community leaders of Ligawasan Marsh and mostly-Christian peace researchers from MSU-GenSan. No script was imposed on them; they were free to make their own scripts.

We theorized that joint theater experiences could take the place of more formal peace dialogues. Peace talks tend to be packed in a language and legalisms that favor the more dominant group. In unscripted theater, the less dominant group like the Ligawasan Marsh leaders, are able to express intense emotions and muted historical pains, with their body movements and visceral cries, in a collective and safe space.

There were around 7 theater exercises. In the first, the two groups warmed up their emotions toward each other. Then eventually, they expressed collective memories and the pains of war through the enactment of Bakwit (war evacuation). Finally, both groups looked to the future, together. I now show you 45 seconds of the theater exercise where our participants from Ligawasan Marsh reenacted their Bakwit memories of the Mindanao war. Both our qualitative and quantitative findings show that relations between the groups turned more positive after the theater experience.

A third and final cultural divide addressed by this research project consisted of the gap between intellectual work produced by Global South organic intellectuals like our research lab on one hand, and on the other hand, the vast production of academic literature churned out by universities based in the developed world. We note that our paper was published in Political Psychology, the flagship journal of our discipline. The journal website holds an Impact Factor of 4.0 and a Scopus CiteScore of 8.0. Based on Scimago, the journal is in the first quartile of journals listed under Social Psychology as well as Political Science and International Relations. Thus, we expect the paper to be well-positioned in the future. Yes, it is possible to publish in the top journals of the West, even if, or actually precisely because, the Global South has something to say about the science of the social.

I would like to thank the Ateneo de Manila for its steady and longtime support of our research agenda on a psychology of democratization and peacebuilding, through the Office of Research, Creative Work and Innovation. Our gratitude also goes to the Psychology Department, for its kindhearted embrace of our intellectual dream. Salamat to our home base, the Political Psychology of Democratization Lab – to all our undergraduates, graduate students, and young faculty - for walking with us through all our craziness. Thank you to MSU-GenSan, especially Mario Aguja and Ronaldo Bigsang for your valuable and thought-full contributions to our paper. And, most specially, thank you to Kathleen Soler and Joshua Uyheng, for all the sleepless nights and stressful deadlines we survived together.

Maraming salamat po.